

Focused on Bo

MSG Bob Haskell



Soldiers of the 3rd Armd. Cav. Regt. confront unruly "civilians" during training at Fort Polk, La., prior to deploying to Bosnia.

Elements of the 49th Armd. Div. will move into Bosnia this month to begin a historic mission.

THIS month the National Guard's 49th Armored Division will assume a historic mission. The division's headquarters element, with engineering and signal assets, will move into Eagle Base in Tuzla, Bosnia, and assume command of the active-Army units and Nordic, Polish, Russian and Turkish soldiers now in that multinational theater of operations.

This will be the first time

MSG Bob Haskell works for the National Guard Bureau Public Affairs Office in Alexandria, Va.

since World War II that a National Guard division has taken on that level of responsibility.

But both National Guard and Reserve participation in global events has seen a steady increase since the Dayton Accords ended the ethnic warfare in Bosnia in November 1995. More than 19,000 reserve-component soldiers have served in Europe as part of either the original Implementation Force or the Stabilization Force into which it evolved.

Before the 116th Infantry

Regiment of Virginia's 29th Inf. Div. was sent to guard a bridge over the Sava River in 1997, no National Guard infantry unit had deployed overseas since the Vietnam War. Since 1997, Apache helicopters from North Carolina and South Carolina have been sent to Kuwait to fly cover for units on Operation Southern Watch duty, and infantry soldiers from Arkansas and Oregon are currently guarding Patriot missile batteries in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

The 49th Div., which was

Bosnia



Story by MSG Bob Haskell

BOSNIA AND
HERZEGOVINA

formed in 1947, has crammed three years of training into the past year while preparing to take on this mission. The 29th Inf. Div. will pick up the Bosnia command-and-control mission in October 2001, and Pennsylvania's 28th Inf. Div. takes the mission a year later.

In addition to the active-Army and multinational units in the area, the 49th Armd. Div. headquarters staff will also direct 300 Guard soldiers from nine other states.

Also under the division's command, nearly 3,000 active-duty soldiers of the 3rd Armd. Cavalry Regt. will patrol the Zone of Separation and keep the lid on political and ethnic unrest in Brcko, still the country's most volatile flash point.

The biggest job may involve keeping the countryside safe so a projected 90,000 displaced people can return to their homes during the rotation. That would be the largest number yet, even though the war ended four years ago.

Simulated Bosnian towns and camps were among the training sites at Fort Polk's Joint Readiness Training Center where the troops trained during Exercise Lone Star Challenge.

JRTC, which exists to train infantry units for combat, has also become more sophisticated in preparing troops for peace-keeping. Two of its 10 annual training rotations focus on such skills as negotiating with ethnic factions and working with translators.

The training includes observing and reporting on political rallies and dealing with protestors and groups demanding



SFC Brenda Benner

Texas Guard SGT Christopher Watson (left) and active-duty SGT Mark St. Peter help erect a Bailey bridge during the Fort Polk training.

assistance. All the while, the soldiers are coached and evaluated by JRTC's observer-controllers.

"It's all to help them know what they're doing. That's why

we're here, to show the soldiers," said Boris Dilber, who left Bosnia eight years ago and now assists in the deployment training.

Dilber says the people in his native land would still be fighting were it not for the presence of NATO forces, because "there are too many old, deep wounds."

It makes no difference if the troops belong to the active Army or the National Guard, he added. "It doesn't matter where the soldiers come from, as long as they know what to do."

That was the intent of the training at Fort Polk — to teach the 49th Armd. and 3rd ACR soldiers to work as a team.

"I think it's good how we interact like this," said 3rd ACR SGT Michael Deliberti. "I give the Guard people credit for coming out and doing this. I think they should do more stuff like it." □

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During the predeployment training PV2 Zach Miller of the 3rd ACR meets roleplayers portraying reporters. The encounter will help him in later encounters with real press members.